

## **Report on Nantucket Cemeteries**

### **Nantucket Cemeteries :**

Founders' Burial Ground

Lost Quaker Cemetery

Mill Hill/Colored Cemetery

Native American Burial Grounds

Newtown Burial Ground

New North Cemetery

Old North Cemetery

Old Polpis Burial Ground

Prospect Hill Cemetery

Quaker Burial Ground

Quaise Burial Ground

St. Mary's Cemetery

Edward Lewis Memorial Cemetery (Unitarian Cemetery)

## Founder's Cemetery

### **Description**

Also referred to as the First Settlers' Burial Ground and the Forefather's Cemetery, the Founders' Burial Ground is a small plot of land located off Cliff Road and overlooking Maxcey's Pond. Two markers are on the site: a large memorial, with the names of the island's first male European settlers, and a facsimile of the John Gardner stone.

The text of this memorial reads:

ERECTED A.D. 1881. BY  
A DESCENDANT OF THE FIRST  
SETTLERS OF NANTUCKET  
IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHOSE REMAINS  
ARE BURIED ON THIS HALLOWED SPOT  
WHERE STOOD THE FIRST CHURCH  
GATHERED HERE IN 1711,  
SINCE REMOVED TO WHERE IT  
NOW STANDS AS THE VESTRY OF THE  
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY.  
1609 - TRISTAM COFFIN - 1681  
1598 - THOMAS MACY - 1682.  
1604 - EDWARD STARBUCK - 1690  
1617 - PETER FOLGER - 1690.  
1624 - JOHN GARDNER - 1706  
1664 - JOHN SWAIN. JR. - 1738.  
1644 - JOHN COLEMAN - 1715.  
1626 - RICHARD GARDNER - 1688.  
1598 - CHRISTOPHER HUSSEY - 1686.  
1640 - WILLIAM BUNKER - 1712.

The original of the Gardner stone was replaced in 1881 when Tristram Coffin raised funds to have a replica made. The original resides with the Nantucket Historical Association.

### **History**

Reportedly, the first legal records mention of the "forefather's burial ground" date from 1838:

*"I mention that the ancient burial ground of our forefathers, the first settlers of this Island, at the eastward of Macy's Pond (So called) which is about three hundred feet square, be reserved as a sacred spot and that the same shall not be laid out by the Proprietors of the common and undivided land on the Island of Nantucket to any individual, company or individuals hereafter and that the same shall not be appropriated for any other purpose and any set of men that have mind to enclose*

*the same with a fence be permitted so to do." (Record of the proprietors April 12, 1838. Recorded by Peter F. Eiver. Registry of Deeds, Nantucket, Mass.)*

It is uncertain how long there has been only one stone in this burying ground. In *Nantucket Scraps*, by Jane Austin, copyrighted 1882, it is noted that "the only visible proofs remaining are one stone with its legend quite obliterated [the Gardner stone], and another in tolerable preservation" (p. 43). An article in the *Weekly Mirror* (November 29, 1851) states that only a "single dilapidated monument still remains" [the Gardner stone], but notes that three others were there within memory, that of Prince Coffin, Peter Folger, and John Jepson. Whether the stones have been stolen or covered over with the buildup of time is uncertain.

The Nantucket Historical Association was made the official trustee for this cemetery by the Nantucket Board of Selectmen at the June 20th, 1973 meeting.

### ***Actions***

Access to this cemetery has been challenging in the past. The right-of-way on the plot map is blocked by a ditch and overgrown. The traditionally used walking path ending at the memorial stone, was blocked by development, probably in the 1980s. Since then, the only clear access is through a private drive, until recently owned by the Biglows. In September 2004, the Founders' Cemetery was partially cleared. Thanks to Jim Powers (behind the wheel), Frank Powers (who lent the equipment), and Georgen Charnes (of the Nantucket Historical Association). Plans have been made to provide access through the neighboring property owned by the Anglers' Club.

### ***Needs***

- A monument to memorialize all the settlers, including the women.
- Fencing. This cemetery is in danger of encroachment.
- Access. Currently the only access is through a private driveway.
- Protection. Encroachment through development is a danger. A shed is partly built on the site.
- Signage from road.
- Poling for buried stones.
- Density investigation for stones or graves.

## **Lost Quaker Cemetery**

### ***Description***

Unmarked, overgrown, encroached upon by housing.

### ***History***

The first Quaker, or Friends, Burial Ground occupied one acre near the south end of Maxcey's Pond and was reportedly used for interments from about 1711 until 1760.

### ***Actions***

None.

### ***Needs***

- Research records to find more precise location.
- The town needs to get land.
- Fence.
- Signage.
- Poling for buried stones.
- Density investigation for stones or graves.

## **Mill Hill Cemetery**

### ***Description***

Originally called the "colored cemetery," this burial ground is the resting place of some of the black, Hawaiian, and Cape Verdean people who died on Nantucket. Markers date from 1812 to 1999. Many markers are in very bad condition.

### ***Action***

In response to a school project, the DPW cleared much of the brush away in ca. 2002, and inscriptions were recorded. A map was made by a PI:N student in 2004.

### ***Needs***

- Repair of stones. These are some of the most damaged stones on the island.
- Poling for buried stones.
- Density investigation for stones or graves.

### **Native American Burial Grounds**

There are several known burial grounds on the island, the location of which is not publicized. One that is publicly known, however, is the Miacomet Indian Burial Ground, lies on Surfside Road. Indian remains were found when ground was broken for construction of a housing development by the Nantucket Housing Authority in 1987. The burial ground was dedicated in September 1993 in a ceremony featuring blessings and speeches by representatives of Native American groups and town and state officials. It is marked with an inscribed stone. Augie Ramos and Joanne Holdgate received an award from the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their efforts.

Miacomet Indian Burial Ground is one of the largest in the state and contains the graves of probably more than 200 Native Americans, according to Brona Simon, Massachusetts State Archeologist. It was used as the graveyard of the Native American Christian meeting house that once stood nearby. Many of those buried at the site died during the epidemic of 1763 and 1762 that took the lives of 222 Native Americans.

Massachusetts state law has established procedures for what to do when human remains are found. Private citizens are required to contact state or local police and the regional medical examiner about the discovery and location. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has a fact sheet (KnowHow #4 (pdf)) on this issue and also has an online article, "Massachusetts General Laws and Human Burials," by Valerie A. Talmage, discussing the legalities of the situation at <http://www.tauntonriver.org/massgenburial.htm>

## **Newtown Burial Ground**

### ***Description***

Located on Sparks Avenue. It is also called "Old South Cemetery." The cemetery dates from at least 1775, the earliest date inscribed on an existing stone. Many markers have been damaged, by vandalism and weather.

### ***History***

The term "Newtown" was first used at a town meeting held on March 8, 1727/8 probably referring to the newly developed area south of the Town of Nantucket.

### ***Actions***

Inscriptions recorded

### ***Needed***

- Many stones need repairing.
- Signage.

## **New North Cemetery**

### ***Description***

New North Cemetery is an extension of the Old North Cemetery, located on New Lane.

### ***History***

The cemetery was opened in the 1820s.

### ***Actions***

Inscriptions recorded.

### ***Needed***

- Many stones need repairing.
- Signage.



## Old North Cemetery

### **Description**

Located on New Lane, across from New North Cemetery. Much of the site is clear, either because of missing or buried markers or never used. Many markers are in poor condition. Some are overgrown on the edge of the site.

### **History**

The Old North Cemetery was originally the private burial ground of the Gardner family. The oldest tombstone now standing is that of Margaret Hussey, which bears the date of December 14, 1746. However, a newspaper article (*Weekly Mirror*, November 29, 1851) states that Abigail Gardner was the first interred there in 1709, but her stone could not be found at that time. In March 1908, Henry Wyer placed a notice in the *Inquirer & Mirror* that a fence around the site was completed, one of wooden posts and "the best grade of galvanized wire."

At a special town meeting on August 14, 1923, the Town took over the Old North Cemetery under the statute that permits towns to take possession of abandoned or neglected burying grounds, and appointed the NHA the caretaker of the site. However, the specifics of those duties were not specified. In 1929, a call was made for funds to help the NHA clear paths. In 1936, the NHA, using Town funds, cleared brambles and planted privet at the boundaries.

In an undated article in the *Inquirer & Mirror*, it's noted that the WPA (which existed between 1936 and 1943) graded the cemetery and took out weeds and bushes. They noted at that time that "slabs of slate and wood have been located buried two feet under ground, with the names and dates worn off." It is likely that fieldstones, used to mark children's graves, were removed at that time.

### **Actions**

Inscriptions recorded.

### **Needs**

- Signage.
- Poling for buried stones.
- Density investigation for stones or graves.

## **Old Polpis Burial Ground**

### ***Description***

The Old Polpis Burial Ground is on Polpis Road.

### ***History***

The burial ground is believed to be as old as the first settlement of the area, which dates from the mid-1660s. Among those buried there were members of the Swain family-the original settlers of this section of Nantucket-as well the farming community that for many years maintained the several farms in Polpis.

### ***Actions***

### ***Needs***

## **Prospect Hill Cemetery**

### ***Description***

Bounded on two sides by Hummock Pond Road, and also by Milk and Vestal streets, the Prospect Hill Cemetery is the principal Protestant burial ground. The earliest existing stone dates from 1811. Papers pertaining to cemetery business, including receipts for lots sold in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, date from 1873. Mt. Vernon Cemetery, whose land was purchased in 1884, has been incorporated into Prospect Hill. The Prospect Hill Cemetery is maintained by the Prospect Hill Association.

### ***History***

### ***Actions***

Inscriptions in process of being recorded.

### ***Needs***

Many stones need repair.

## **Quaker Burial Ground**

### ***Description***

Located at Quaker and Madaket road. There are few headstones. Quakers disapproved of the use of headstones, considering them idolatrous (graves were most likely set off by unmarked fieldstones), although nineteenth-century sects, such as the Gurneyites and Hicksites, did use gravestones. The unstoned field has inspired at least one poem, Robert Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket." The NHA library contains correspondence dating from 1910 concerning the use of the burial ground.

### ***History***

Began being used in 1730

### ***Actions***

Inscriptions recorded.

### ***Needs***

- Signage.

## **Quaise Burial Ground**

### ***Description***

The Quaise Burial Ground is located near the entrance to Altar Rock Road. Inmates of Quaise Asylum, the island's nineteenth-century poorhouse and place of correction, were buried here. There are no stones in this burying ground.

### ***History***

Within recent memory, the site was marked by a large stone that has now disappeared.

Many of the inmates died in a fire. One report of the names of individuals buried in this site are:

Thomas Hull, Paul Jenkins, Jonathan Cartwright, William Holmes, William Hutchins, Abigail Davis, Sophia Beebe, Phebe Jones, Lydia Bowen, Wealthy Davis

### ***Actions***

### ***Needs***

- Signage or memorial stone.

## **St. Mary's Cemetery**

### ***Description***

St. Mary's Cemetery is located between Joy and Vestal streets. Records are located for this cemetery at St. Mary's.

### ***History***

This cemetery has been in use since the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

### ***Actions***

### ***Needs***

## **Edward Lewis Memorial Cemetery (Unitarian Cemetery)**

### ***Description***

The Unitarian Cemetery is on Somerset Road. The cemetery, which is an extension of the Prospect Hill Cemetery, dates from the twentieth century.

### ***History***

### ***Actions***

### ***Needs***